

# WOMEN IN ARCHAEOLOGY

Close your eyes and picture an archaeologist?

Did you picture a woman forcefully placing a shovel in the ground or carefully troweling away soil from the base of an excavation unit? Many of you will probably picture a male archaeologist.

Archeology has been a scientific field dominated by men while the women who advanced the field were often left out of the history of the discipline. We hear a great deal about William C. Mills, Henry Shetrone, and even Ephraim Squier and Edwin Davis (who were not even trained archaeologists), yet there are very few mentions of the influential roles that women played in archeology in the Midwest.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, career options were sparse for women and even discouraged after marriage and motherhood. When women went to work, they were restricted by the type of work available; they could be teachers, secretaries, nurses, or household workers. Very rarely did women enter university setting as students, researchers, and professors. Fields that involved manual labor and high levels of reasoning were thought to be unfit for women; archeology was one such field.



An excavation site featuring a recently discovered axe head (center). NPS / Tom Engberg

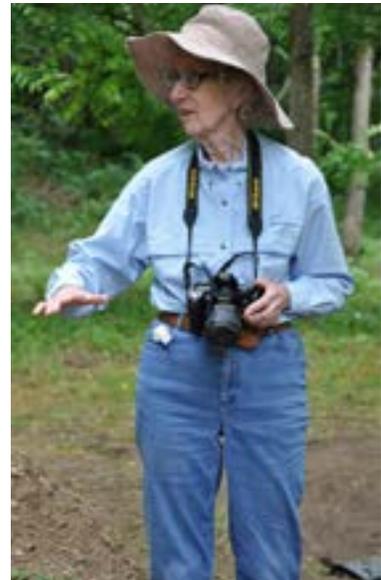
Archaeological fieldwork can be daunting. Long hot hours are spent outdoors, tons of soil are scraped away by hand, there are bugs, and of course the dirt and grime that results from the work. Data analysis and interpretation involves a great deal of time researching evidence found in the field during excavation. Such conditions and activities were considered “not becoming” for a lady. However, due to the strength and determination of pioneer female archaeologists, women have continued to enter the field of archeology, revolutionize the discipline, and show that women can do anything they put their minds to.

Women have always been strong and capable. Even before the passage of the 19th amendment guaranteed women the right to vote and to participate as valuable members of society, women were challenging expectations and moving forward and making a difference. Female scientists must remain strong and tenacious while continuing to break down barriers and contribute to our knowledge of the world and encourage others to do the same!

Read on to learn about one of the female scientists who played a significant role in our understanding of Hopewell Archeology and continues to inspire and encourage archaeologists in the Midwestern United States and beyond, Doctor N'omi Greber.

## **Dr. N'omi Greber - RENOWNED HOPEWELL ARCHAEOLOGIST**

N'omi Greber (right) did not plan on being a pioneer in archeology. She was born in 1929 in a small town in Connecticut. As a young girl, she found a love of mathematics and astronomy, but going to college wasn't always a popular choice for women at the time. Immediately after graduating high school in 1947, she enrolled at Smith College to study the subjects she enjoyed, mathematics and astronomy. After that, she made an even more unusual choice for a woman of her age: she enrolled in a graduate program at Harvard University to continue her study of mathematics. In fact, Harvard did not start allowing women into classes until 1943 and did not award women degrees from the University until 1963.



After N'omi finished her master's degree, she settled down and started her family. While she loved life as a mother, she still wanted to continue learning – and along the way, she found a new academic interest: archeology. Sometime in the late 1960s or early 1970s, N'omi made the bold decision to go back to school – something completely unheard of for a young mother at the time. She began her PhD program in Anthropology at Case Western University in Cleveland. Little did she know her research would entirely transform the field of Ohio archeology.

Dr. Greber's archeological research focused on American Indians who participated in Hopewell culture – the very culture who built the incredible earthwork sites



Dr. N'omi Greber (2nd from left) oversees work at an archaeological excavation site.

protected by Hopewell Culture National Historical Park today. Although many archeologists of the time had started to consider the field a science of the things people left behind, Dr. Greber was more interested in how past people lived. Dr. Greber liked to think about the everyday things the earliest people of Ohio might have experienced; she took joy in witnessing moments of nature at these sacred sites, like a light show of a million fireflies, and

cherished the thought of sharing such an incredible experience with the people of the Hopewell culture, 2,000 years apart.

Dr. N'omi Greber's work changed the way we consider the Hopewell culture. She breathed human life into a complex archeological topic and helped us imagine how these people might have lived their life, and how they managed to come together to build such tremendous sites. There is not a Hopewell archeologist today who is not familiar with the over 60 published works of Dr. N'omi Greber.



Dr. Greber speaks to visitors at an archaeology exhibit information table.

Dr. N'omi Greber and others like her prove that women can do anything; they can be mothers as well as scientists, researchers, and academics. It was likely the path Dr. Greber took was not easy and she faced challenges that her male colleagues did not have to face just because she was a woman. Even today, it is not uncommon for women to continue to be challenged because of their gender. However, we can look to Dr. N'omi Greber as an inspiration to follow our passions. She found what she loved and pursued it with gusto inspiring so many students, both male and female, along the way. Ohio and midwestern archeology would not be the same without her influence.

Read on to learn about one the magnificent Hopewell Earthwork complexes she excavated alongside her crew of archaeologists, students, and volunteers!

**Before you move on, take time to consider the following questions:**

- 1. Do you think barriers still exist for women to enter scientific fields?**
- 2. What can our culture or society do to overcome whatever challenges still exist?**
- 3. Why is it important to remember scientists like N'omi Greber?**